Jean-Luc Marion's theory of saturated phenomena is one of the most exciting developments in phenomenology in recent decades. It opens up new possibilities for understanding phenomena by beginning from rich and complex examples such as revelation and works of art. Rather than being curiosities or exceptions, these “excessive” or “saturated” phenomena are, in Marion's view, paradigms. He understands more straightforward phenomena, such as the objects of the natural sciences, as reduced and impoverished versions of the excess given in saturated phenomena. This book is a systematic and comprehensive study of Marion's texts on saturated phenomena and their place in his wider phenomenology of givenness, tracing both his theory and his examples across a wide range of texts spanning three decades. The author argues that a rich hermeneutics is implicit in Marion's examples of saturated phenomena, but is not set out in his theory. This hermeneutics makes clear that attempts to overthrow the much-criticized sovereignty of the Cartesian ego will remain unsuccessful if they simply reverse the subject-object relation by speaking of phenomena imposing themselves with an overwhelming givenness on a recipient. Instead, phenomena should be understood as appearing in a hermeneutic space already opened by a subject's active reception. Thus, a phenomenon's appearing depends not only on its givenness, but also on the way it is interpreted by the receiving subject. All phenomenology is, therefore, necessarily hermeneutic.
This book is a critical examination of the philosophical strategies for defending religious belief. The main strategies may be presented as conforming to the end nodes of a decision tree for a believer. The faithful can interpret a credal statement (e.g. ‘God exists’) either as a factual claim, or otherwise. If it is a factual claim, they can either be warranted to endorse it without evidence, etc., or not. Finally, should religious belief require evidential support, then ought that support be assessed by the same criteria that we use in evaluating evidence in science, or not? Each of these options has been defended by prominent analytic philosophers of religion. In Part I, Herman Philipse assesses the tenability of each of these strategies and argues that the most promising option for believers who want to be justified in accepting their creed in our scientific age is the Bayesian cumulative case strategy developed by Richard Swinburne. Parts II and III are devoted to an in-depth analysis of this case for theism. Using a ‘strategy of subsidiary arguments’, Philipse concludes (1) that theism cannot be stated meaningfully; (2) that if theism were meaningful, it would have no predictive power concerning existing evidence, so that Bayesian arguments cannot get started; and (3) that if the Bayesian cumulative case strategy did work, one should conclude that atheism is more probable than theism. According to a referee, the book is ‘full of careful, rigorous reasoning – much of it original’.

Analogy, Metaphor, and Coherence
Herman Philipse

in God in the Age of Science?: A Critique of Religious Reason

Published in print: 2012 Published Online: May 2012
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199697533.003.0007

Theism can be an existential hypothesis confirmable by empirical evidence only if the reference of the proper name ‘God’ can be spelled out in words that are mostly used literally. However, it is argued in Chapter 7 that all psychological terms characterizing God are used in an irreducibly analogical manner, because by claiming that God is bodiless, theists annul the very conditions for applying psychological predicates to another entity literally. The term ‘person’ as applied to God cannot be used literally either. But if theism can only be formulated in terms that are used in irreducibly analogical ways, it conveys virtually nothing by what it says, so that it cannot be an existential hypothesis that is confirmable by empirical evidence. Richard Swinburne’s attempts to show that theism can be stated in words, most of which are used literally, are criticized, as are his philosophical arguments for substance
dualism, which are meant to show that even human identity consists in
the continuing life of a spirit, which can exist without a body.